

THE "CULT" OF "KING JAMES ONLYISM"?

Updated January 8, 2004(first published August 21, 1997 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

The following is the Introduction to the book *For Love of the Bible: The Battle for the King James Bible and the Received Text from 1800 to Present*, by David W. Cloud, copyright 1995, available from Way of Life Literature:

The charge has been made that today's defenders of the King James Bible form a new phenomenon which has arisen through the influence of a mere handful of misguided men. One writer claims that the "King James Only" position can be traced to Seventh-day Adventist Benjamin Wilkinson, who wrote *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated* in 1930. This is as incredible as claiming that Fundamentalism can be traced to a snake handler or that Dispensationalism can be traced to a Jesuit priest. Others think the defense of the KJV can be linked to Peter Ruckman of Pensacola, Florida.

This type of misrepresentation has always been part and parcel with the defense of the modern texts and versions, but it has increased in intensity in recent years and is finding a home even among those who claim to be Fundamentalists. Pastor Denis Gibson, Calvary Baptist Church, Brampton, Ontario, Canada, who has been in the ministry since 1958, gives this testimony: "I see a real hostility that has been generated in the minds of some of the younger pastors. There does not seem to be, on their part, a serious interest in dealing with this issue. ... It is the hostility, however, that is troubling. Sides are forming and deep prejudices are evident. To be 'a King James man' is now a term of opprobrium. This opposition is within 'so-called' evangelicalism, not as in the past, from the liberal-modernist camp" (Letter of April 19, 1995). Pastor Gibson has considerable experience on both sides of this issue. He was a Presbyterian minister for 10 years, then pastored a Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada congregation for 17 years before becoming an Independent Baptist.

There can be no doubt that the King James Bible *is* the historic Bible of English-speaking believers and has been for four centuries. In fact, the King James Bible is a revision of that line of Received Text English Bibles stretching back to William Tyndale in 1524. Today, though, this ancient position is looked upon as new and divisive! King Ahab charged faithful Elijah with troubling Israel. In fact, it was Ahab, with his apostasies and improvisations, who was doing the troubling (1 Kings 18:17,18). We are convinced this is precisely the case today. It is the modern version proponents, with their roots in nineteenth-century Rationalism, who are troubling the churches with their innovations.

Before we show the fallacy of claiming that King James defenders are a twentieth-century cult, we must establish our definition of terms. What is "King James Only"? To make proper sense of things, it must be recognized that there is a tremendous variety of opinion among those who defend the

Textus Receptus (also called the TR, the Received Text, and the Traditional Text) and the King James Bible. Those who fall into the scope of our study are those who see the Received Text as the preserved text of Holy Scripture and who view the major Protestant translations thereof (the KJV, the Luther Bible, etc.) as accurate translations of the correct Text. Within this general camp there is considerable variety as to exactly how the TR and the KJV are perceived. There are differences of opinion in regard to the Greek Received Text itself, some believing it is perfectly settled, others believing it needs some minor revision. There are also differences of opinion in regard to the KJV as a translation. Some view the KJV as equal to the underlying Text. Others have respect for the KJV as a generally accurate translation of the correct manuscripts but believe it needs minor improvement. A number of the writers whose works appear in David Otis Fuller's books took this position:

"We fully admit that there are here and there passages of which the translation might be improved, as, for instance, 'love' for 'charity' throughout I Cor. 13. But we deprecate any alteration as a measure that the smallest sprinkling of good would deluge us with a flood of evil" (Joseph Charles Philpot, "The Authorized Version-1611," *True Or False?* Third Printing, 1978, p. 21).

"No reasonable person imagines that the translators were infallible or that their work was perfect, but no one acquainted with the facts can deny that they were men of outstanding scholarship, well qualified for their important work, or that with God's blessing they completed their great task with scrupulous care and fidelity" (Terence Brown, "The Learned Men," *Which Bible?* fifth edition, 1984 reprint, p. 13).

"In speaking of this class of changes we do not fail to recognize, what is admitted by all competent authorities, that the A.V. could be corrected in a number of passages where the meaning is now obscured because of changes which three centuries have brought about in the meaning of English words, or where diligent study or recent discoveries have brought to light better readings. Such instances, however, are comparatively few, whereas the R.V. gives us about 36,000 departures, small and great, from the A.V. What shall we say of such a host of changes?" (Philip Mauro, "Which Version?" *True Or False?* pp. 101,102).

This is the type of variety of which I speak. All of these positions could be summarized as "King James Only" in that all believe that the King James Bible is the only accurate English translation of the right Hebrew and Greek texts. Though there is a serious difference between the various applications of this position, and I personally take exception to any position which claims that we no longer have a perfect Bible, the fact is that all of these varied positions on the TR and the KJV are based upon the same promises of Scripture and the same basic theological platform. All reject the critical Westcott-Hort line of texts. All believe the modern English versions are founded upon a corrupted family of manuscripts. All emphasize the doctrine of biblical preservation.

Some, though, as we have noted, persist in identifying every King James defender as a follower of some cultist, or of Peter Ruckman, who, from his base in Pensacola, Florida, has been occupied for

many years with his weird, angry tirade toward the members of something he calls the Alexandrian cult.

One fellow who is guilty of this defines a "KJV onlyite" as "one who believes that the KJV is the only legitimate translation in English, it perfectly preserves God's word in the form He intended for us to have, that it is unalterable, and any revision would de facto constitute corruption, that the English is inherently adequate for all matters, and therefore the Greek and Hebrew are now irrelevant, even unnecessary. It is this point of view which had its seeds in Wilkinson's writings, was transmitted through Ray, then expounded in a modified and more extreme form by Fuller and Ruckman, evolving into the movement as it is now constituted."

This is a slanderous caricature of what J.J. Ray and D.O. Fuller believed. Neither man believed that the King James Bible is incapable of revision. Dr. Fuller said: "We do not say that the KJV does not permit of changes. There are a number that could be and should be made, but there is a vast difference between a change and an error" (Fuller, *Is the King James Version Nearest to the Original Autographs?* nd., p. 1). J.J. Ray said, "There are a few mis-translations in the King James English, but every word is based upon a Greek word in the Textus Receptus which was given by the inspiration of God, and has been providentially preserved for us today" (*God Wrote Only One Bible*, p. 102). Though Ray and Fuller believed the Authorized Version is an adequate translation, neither man taught that Greek and Hebrew are irrelevant or that the KJV could in never be revised. To say that the KJV is the only legitimate existing translation in English is not to say that it is unalterable. To say that the KJV accurately preserves God's word is not to say that any revision would *de facto* constitute corruption. To say that the English is inherently adequate is not to say that the Greek and Hebrew are irrelevant and unnecessary or that the English somehow replaces the Greek and Hebrew.

It is this type of careless, inaccurate, unfair, broad-brushed caricaturization that has darkened the entire debate surrounding the KJV vs. modern versions.

To lump every defender of the King James Bible into one monolithic camp and to pretend that all believe the same thing and march to the same piper's tune in regard to Bible texts and versions is either ignorance or dishonesty. It is one thing to criticize the perceived errors and extremism and peculiarities of some individual personality. That is easy to do inasmuch as every member of the human race is peculiar and prone to mistakes! It is quite another thing to pretend that all defenders of the King James Bible are followers of some man. Many, though, are guilty of doing this very thing. They are caught up with the personalities of the movement and refuse to face the real issues.

Let me also emphasize, because I know from past experience that some will misunderstand and misrepresent my position, that I am not encouraging the variety which exists among King James Bible defenders. I'm simply saying this variety is a reality which must be acknowledged. If I had my way everyone would hold the RIGHT position, which is, of course, MY position! (I say that tongue in cheek, of course. I am not so deceived to think that I am right in everything.) I believe the King James Bible is an accurate and lovely translation of the preserved Greek and Hebrew text of

Scripture. I do not believe the King James Bible contains any errors. (That is not to say that it cannot be updated or that things could not be translated differently.) I believe that God had His hand upon the KJV in a special way because of the singular role it would play in the transmission of the Word of God during a long and crucial epoch of church history. (This is not to say that I believe it is some sort of “advanced revelation.”) In contrast with the modern English versions, I believe that the KJV is based upon a superior underlying text; it was produced by superior translators; it incorporates superior translation techniques; it demonstrates a superior theology; it embodies a superior English; it was created in a superior era; and it has a superior history.

To reject the King James Bible for the modern versions is one's privilege this side of eternity; to claim or imply, on the other hand, that the King James Bible is no longer defensible and is only guarded today by sentimental, tradition-bound obscurantists is to darken the truth.

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